

## Husky Compact Reflection: Engage as a Member of a Diverse and Multicultural World

Levi Johnson & Kai Zhou

In connection with the project “Cross-cultural Student Teaching Internship Engagement”  
Faculty Advisor: Kathryn Johnson

The genesis of this project was to provide better community support and engagement to strengthen the experience for the Chinese SCSU student interns. Feedback from the first five cohorts of students highlighted that they were all feeling isolated from the campus community and experience as a student at SCSU. As a part of a graduate student development internship, focus was placed on helping the student interns grow in independence and embrace cultural open-mindedness. Conducting our interactions mostly in Chinese, although the main presenter is a non-native speaker, led to building better cultural bridges of understanding.

Through this project, we were able to facilitate conversations and reflections with the student intern teachers to develop intercultural competency and process their experience engaging in the community through the teaching of Chinese to local Minnesotan students. They have also grown to recognize and value diverse perspectives and the interdependence among communities, both locally and globally. This is why the chosen dimension of the Husky Compact for this project was “engaging as members of a diverse and multicultural world.” Specifically, through our weekly conversations, they would often share new insights to their understanding of the local culture, whether it be with their host family, in the classroom, or exploring around their community site. One particular example was when a student intern attended the funeral of a close relative of one of her students, which was the first time she had experienced the tradition of an open casket. This was a surprising revelation for her and opened up new understanding in that opportunity for culture sharing. Another example was over holiday time, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas, when their students would be so excited to teach the teachers how to best celebrate. This unique exchange provided for a role-reversal as the young children in the schools and host families became the “cultural teachers” to the student interns.

We also guided them through the process of “seeking and applying the knowledge” gained through the experience in both a personal and professional manner. In integrating to a new culture and community, they were forced to adjust their cultural norms openly which led to a better understanding of the diverse influence on one’s personal identity. Encountering differences and uncomfortable situations caused them reflect upon their values and expectations, which led to many fruitful and sometimes humorous conversations. Another integrated part of this was the application and understanding of a Minnesota “Teacher Candidates Professional Dispositions” which is a part of the student teaching experience for all student teacher candidates from SCSU. This contributed to their overall understanding of an American philosophy of teaching and learning that is student centered rather than teacher centered as practiced in China.

Overall, this project has expanded the understanding on several levels to see how our experience locally impacts and is shaped by being members of a global society and global economy. It is a small representation of positive change that can be made and multiplied through deliberate attention to building community cross-culturally. Being able to better critically analyze multiple world-views and systems through their interactions teaching in schools has helped them integrate other perspectives to

grow together to see their part in significant local and global solutions to a future of more mutual cultural awareness. We firmly believe that this experience will contribute positively to their future careers in teaching in China.